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June 23, 2020

The Honorable David L. Bernhardt  
Secretary of the Interior  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a global health crisis affecting the United States. In particular, the District of Columbia and broader National Capital Region have been hotspots for the disease. In light of this fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published guidelines for operating during COVID-19. These guidelines stipulate that the size of an event or gathering should be determined based on state, local, territorial or tribal safety laws and regulations. Washington DC Recovery entered Phase II on Monday, June 22, 2020. Under this guidance, mass gatherings of more than 50 people are prohibited on non-federal land. So, I am surprised that, given this information, you and President Trump would want to go forward with a large-scale mass gathering at the White House South Lawn, Ellipse, and National Mall on July 4<sup>th</sup>.

In order to understand how the Department and/or NPS plan to manage the event, I request the following information:

- What coordination has there been with the District of Columbia?
- Since public transit system operations are reduced in response to COVID-19, how will the public travel to and from the event and what steps are being taken to prevent overcrowding on platforms and on buses and rail cars?
- How will crowd control be conducted? Will the density of people be controlled so that recommended social distancing can be attained?
- At a minimum, for public safety, will you be providing masks to the public and encouraging their use?
- What additional sanitation measures will be taken for temporary restrooms and hydration stations?

Plans to host a firework display at Mount Rushmore National Memorial on July 3, 2020 present a different set of challenges, specifically regarding wildfire potential in the surrounding area. According to the NPS Environmental Assessment, wildfire risk is dependent on the Memorial's ability to reduce fuel

loading prior to the event through prescribed fire, pile burning, or other forest management actions. Did COVID-19 impact these activities or were they completed as planned? What is the current wildland fire potential for the area?

In announcing the planned fireworks on April 28, NPS stated that they would work with partner agencies to develop:

- A plan to address event traffic control, visitor management, and emergency response.
- A plan for event staging and demobilization activities.
- A wildland fire response plan.
- A Unified Command incident management team and a Go/No-Go checklist.

I request documentation of these plans, and a description of how the responsibility to minimize the spread of COVID-19 has been incorporated into these plans. For example, the primary seating area for the Mount Rushmore event is the amphitheater, which can accommodate about 1,800 visitors. Will the amphitheater be filled to capacity or will seating be arranged to conform with social distancing guidelines? What additional sanitation measures will be taken for restrooms, portable toilets, and hydration stations?

For both of these events, what is being done to keep NPS employees safe? What is the Department/NPS's plan if protests take place?

If any conditions exist that could be a threat to public safety, whether from COVID-19 or wildfire, I encourage you to consider cancelling the events. The health and wellbeing of the public and dedicated NPS employees should be paramount during this global health crisis.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Betty McCollum, Chair  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States House of Representatives